

SHARPENING THEIR EDGE

By Rachel Stuart

Side by side, two brothers are making their name in the purebred Angus industry, and defining their operation by the things that uniquely make up Lemenager Cattle.



Luke & Chuck Lemenager know their cattle, know their customers and certainly know how to produce a long-line of champions and foundation genetics. Raising and showing cattle is in their blood and something they have been doing for the greater part of their lives.

Their other specialty? Support after the sale and marketing, which is exactly what makes Lemenager's customer-service mentality a winning combination. Whether it's trimming hooves, traveling to the next show to help fit a calf bought through their sale, or giving breeding and nutrition advice, the Lemenager's customers have come to expect – and appreciate – the added service that comes long after the calf is bought and taken to their new home.

"We provide that same service to all of our customers – year in and year out," says Luke. Through their Labor Day Weekend sale alone, they sell to more than 25 families – which equates to many hours of after-sale support throughout the show season.

"We just make ourselves available," says Chuck. "We want our customers to know that we are here to answer whatever

question, or whatever need they may have. I take care of trimming feet and clipping while Luke is the go-to guy for nutrition, animal health and reproductive questions. We make a pretty uniform team."

Luke believes that one of the best aspects of their added time with customers is getting to know the families they do business with.

"It's fun sharing in on the experience and helping junior families get established," Luke says.

And, while a large portion of their business is selling show calves, their emphasis is on creating females that will excel in



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the show ring, and then go to work in an operation as a foundation female with staying power, they say.

"It is our goal to produce show heifers and steers with enough functionality that their bull mates will work in the real world," Chuck says.

Making a Market

While providing outstanding service is a key component to Lemenager Cattle's success, their marketing strategies are another way to keep bringing in business and making their Angus cattle operation a profitable endeavor.

"It's hard to imagine what selling cattle would be today without the website, cell phones, e-mail or advertising," Luke says. "Those are all very important tools we use in communicating with our customer base."

"Technology as a whole is a big part of why we are able to do more and expand more," says Chuck.

Advertising is something their operation truly believes in.

"We advertise in Illinois and national publications, as well as online," Luke says. "When you have good pictures of good cattle, it doesn't take long for customers to begin to call."

Identifying their two main marketing points have also been helpful in allowing them to get the "most bang for their buck."

"In the Fall, we take advantage of show heifer sale season with our Labor Day Weekend sale. This is where we sell the majority of our females," Luke says. "Then in February, it's Illinois Beef Expo time and the Angus Futurity sale."

They usually sell around 30 females, 20 bulls and five show steers a year.

And, to emphasize the quality of the Lemenager breeding program, their "value-added" philosophy has proven to be very successful – with 85-90% of their 2010 calf crop being sold either private treaty or through a purebred sale.

"Making each calf more valuable is something we really strive for," Chuck says. "When we both have full-time jobs off the farm, and without any row crop acres, our equipment and feed expenses are naturally higher than some – thus increasing the value of each calf becomes more vital."

To ensure value, Luke believes it's the "things that can not be measured" that give them an edge.

"We believe a lot in traits like temperament, feet and leg structure and calves with vigor," Luke says. "We pay attention to things that many times get overlooked. Animals with these traits make good purebred based cattle."

According to Chuck, they can practice what they preach. "We still have cows that even a decade later, we are seeing their impact ongoing in the purebred industry," he says.

Chuck strongly supports being out in the industry and being familiar with new pedigrees, so you will frequently find the Lemenagers at the next state or national show.



Looking Ahead

While the Lemenagers may be about creating show cattle with stayability power, they are also creating a name and a reputation for themselves that is centered around quality – whether it be in their bloodlines, their work ethic, or their business sense.

"It's hard to find genetics that can produce good show heifers, then turn around and produce bulls. That's really challenging," Luke says. But, it is exactly what the Lemenagers are preparing their cattle to do.

"I hope people take a look at our bull and heifer lineup at this year's Beef Expo and see what our genetics are capable of doing," Luke says.

Cattle aren't the only thing to be looking for from the Lemenager brothers in coming years – their young families are sure to hit the Angus scene in a big way when the next generation hits the ring in four or five years.

"Our wives and kids have a strong presence in our operation. Those who know us realize what an important role Stacy and Tori play," Luke says. "You will hardly ever see us at a show or sale without our family, and we are certainly excited with the idea that Paige, Curt and Grace could share our passion of raising and showing purebred cattle."

Yes, exciting times are surely ahead for these two brothers and their families who have a strong foothold and vision for the Illinois purebred livestock industry.

